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ABSTRACT

This document describes a program in District 742 Community Schools in St. Cloud, Minnesota, called Differentiated Career Opportunities for Teachers. This multifaceted program empowers selected teachers with the authority to make decisions and plan programs for their district and individual schools and, at the same time, to renew their professional lives. Through a system of 3-year temporary assignments with additional compensation and protection of their seniority, classroom teachers take on a variety of leadership roles. The program has been in operation since 1984 and appears to be working well. (JD)

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# Differentiated Career Opportunities for Teachers

Ronald M. Jandura, Peter J. Burke

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# Differentiated Career Opportunities for Teachers

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and
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# Introduction

School districts across the nation are trying to find ways to make teaching more attractive and more rewarding. Master teacher plans, career ladders, merit pay, and other incentive schemes are some of the methods school districts have used to try to retain good teachers, keep them motivated, and reward them for their outstanding work. These efforts have had varying degrees of success. In some districts they have been a source of considerable controversy. Implementing them requires an elaborate administrative structure, and they have proven to be quite costly for states and districts where they have been implemented.

Along with the establishment of various teacher incentive schemes has come a call for "teacher empowerment," by which teachers share decision making on matters related to school operations and finance. As NEA President Mary Hatwood Futrell (1986) has said, "The most effective schools are schools in which teachers are granted the resources, the time, and above all, the authority to do their jobs." And AFT President Albert Shanker (1986) argues for teacher decision making in the areas of curriculum, staff development, and selection of instructional materials.

The empowerment concept rests on the belief that decisions should be vested as much as possible in those who are affected by the decisions and are responsible for implementing them. Teachers, as professionals, know what it takes to make schools effective places for

students to learn. If they are given the authority to make decisions about ways to make their schools more effective and are given the authority to allocate fiscal and human resources to those ends, then school improvement should occur.

Current research and expert opinion agree that the individual school is the focal point for educational improvement. Yet most schools are part of a school district; therefore, if teachers are to be "empowered," the concept must pervade the school district as well as the individual school building. Districtwide support systems must exist if individual buildings are to obtain the necessary data on which to base decisions and the resources to carry out those decisions.

This fastback describes a program in District 742 Community Schools in St. Cloud, Minnesota, called Differentiated Career Opportunities for Teachers. This multifaceted program empowers selected teachers with the authority to make decisions and plan programs for their district and individual schools and, at the same time, to renew their professional lives. Through a system of three-year temporary assignments with additional compensation and protection of their seniority, classroom teachers take on a variety of leadership roles. The program has been in operation since 1984 and appears to be working well.

Some of the differentiated career opportunities are in St. Cloud's Staff Performance Review and Development Program (SPRAD), which is chaired by a teacher and uses teachers in peer-coaching roles, although the building administrator retains the evaluation role. Another opportunity to use teachers in leadership roles is in the Program Development Cycle (PDC), which deals with program accountability and continuing curriculum improvement. Opportunites in other program areas include: Academic Achievement (gifted and talented), Chapter I, Student Assistance, Student and Program Assessment, and Special Education. Still another differentiated career opportunity is a teacher who coordinates all clinical experiences in district schools for teacher education students at St. Cloud State University.

All these district programs provide opportunities for selected teachers to take on leadership roles. In these settings they can practice leadership skills with their peers. And in the process, future district-level administrators can be identified. This is a very exciting way to involve teachers and administrators in their own professional development.

The next chapter presents the rationale for St. Cloud's differentiated career program and describes how it got started.

## Rationale for the Differentiated Career Program

District 742 in St. Cloud enrolls approximately 11,000 students in grades K to 12 and has about 700 professional staff. It also operates adult and preschool community education programs as well as postsecondary technical programs. By most financial indicators, the district falls in the average spending range for Minnesota school districts. And like most school districts in this country, regardless of their average per-pupil expenditure, it has few discretionary dollars to launch new programs.

Beginning in the early 1980s, district officials started to think about ways of better utilizing the collective leadership skills of the entire professional staff. At the same time, efforts were under way to involve more parent and community participation in district curricular issues. As district officials pursued the goal of expanded leadership, they also recognized the reality of limited fiscal resources. The differentiated career programs they designed for expanding leadership roles for teachers relied primarily on *using existing funds differently* rather than on infusions of new money.

Many, if not most, school districts are structured so that only administrators are in leadership roles. A basic premise of the differentiated career program is that the professional responsibilities of teachers and administrators are more similar than different. As teachers and administrators pursue a common mission, the similarities become more apparent. All educators, teachers and administra-

tors, can and should give leadership. St. Cloud's differentiated career program provides many opportunities for teachers to exercise leadership.

A second premise of St. Cloud's program is that a pool of untapped talent exists in our classrooms. This is true not only in District 742 but in most school districts. Typically, schools have a cadre of teachers who have recently completed advanced degrees in curriculum, supervision, and the content areas. Some of these are aspiring administrators. Others have acquired information on promising practices and innovations that would be useful for program improvement. Many are looking for a challenge, an opportunity to try out a new idea, or perhaps to change or refine an existing program. St. Cloud's differentiated career program provides a way for using the talents of teachers in our schools, while also contributing to their professional growth.

Using teachers in leadership roles, especially those dealing with curriculum and instruction, lends credibility to any school improvement effort. The expertise they bring to these two vital areas of school improvement comes from their being "in the trenches," so to speak. They are in touch with the realities of working in the classroom. Their knowledge and experience are respected by the teachers with whom they work.

St. Cloud's differentiated career program also serves as a training ground for the district's next generation of administrators. District 742, like many others, will soon experience a high attrition rate among administrators due to retirements. This factor, along with some growth in student enrollment, will create a need for several new administrators. The differentiated career program not only helps in identifying good administrator candidates but also prepares them for leadership posts where the administrative role is being redefined.

The differentiated career program takes into account teacher career stages. (See fastback 214 *Teacher Career Stages: Implications for Staff Development.*) As teachers move through career stages, they may want to move out of the classroom for a time but still use their

knowledge and experience in a different role in the district. As the various differentiated career positions are described later, the importance of accommodating teachers at various career stages will become apparent.

In most school districts, when teachers reach the maximum level on the salary schedule, their salary is frozen. Often these are the most experienced and competent teachers on the staff. To remedy this situation, some districts have established merit pay, career ladders, and other incentive plans to reward exemplary teachers. Such methods pose many problems and are often resisted by teacher unions. The differentiated career program is one way to reward outstanding teachers because they take on a new role that also requires a longer work day and longer work year. In St. Cloud the teachers' association, individual teachers, district administrators, and the school board have supported salary increments for the teachers participating in the differentiated career program.

In District 742, the daily rate of pay for teachers who are at or near the top of the salary schedule (master's + 60 and 15 or more years of experience) is greater than the daily rate of pay for new, inexperienced administrators. With an extended, prorated contract and an additional increment, the daily and annual rate of pay for teachers in differentiated career positions is equivalent to many administrative positions. There is no resentment over this level of compensation, since it is recognized that the teachers in these positions are simply working a longer day and a longer year, while performing activities that are closely related to on-going classroom instruction.

The rationale for the differentiated career program for teachers has been presented in this chapter. The next chapter will cover how the program works in practice.

## How the Differentiated Career Program Works

In order to provide differentiated career opportunities, a school district must look at its existing program areas to see where leadership is needed. In St. Cloud, staff development, curriculum development, instructional improvement, and assessment were all areas needing attention. Also, staff attrition due to resignations, retirements, or reassignments can open up positions that could be filled with differentiated career teachers. For example, when the St. Cloud assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction retired, a decision was made not to fill the position but to use differentiated career personnel to carry out most of the functions of that post. In this case, with one salary released, no additional funding was necessary to support several differentiated career positions.

The next chapter will describe in detail some of the differentiated career positions operating in various program areas in St. Cloud. This chapter discusses the general operation of the differentiated career opportunity program.

### Preparing the Job Descriptions

When a differentiated career position is considered for a program area, the first task is preparing a job description. All the program area staff have an opportunity for input into the job description. Thus, the functions of the job reflect the views of those individuals who

will be working with the person who takes the position. This kind of staff involvement is another way of creating ownership in the program.

One critical consideration in all the job descriptions for differentiated career positions is that no evaluation of other staff is required or expected. Staff evaluation is reserved for administrators. The only real difference between teachers in differentiated career positions and administrators is the responsibility for staff evaluation. Eventually, teachers in these positions will have a role in peer supervision. In fact, St. Cloud's Staff Performance Review and Development Program (SPRAD) could very easily accommodate the peer supervision role and probably should if we are to move in the direction of making teaching a true profession. (See fastback 286 *Peer Supervision: A Way of Professionalizing Teaching*, by Daniel A. Heller.)

## Selecting the Candidates

Only those teachers currently under contract in District 742 are eligible to apply for a differentiated career position. Although teachers and administrators outside the district have expressed interest in applying for the positions, restricting applicants to district staff conveys the message that the administration has confidence in the current staff to perform the job.

After the job description is completed, the next step in the selection process is notifying all staff about the job opening. The job description, which also includes other conditions of employment, is posted for about 20 days. Those applicants who meet the criteria outlined in the job description are then interviewed, and the top candidates are recommended to the superintendent.

The interview process is conducted by two staff committees. One committee consists of teachers; the second consists of administrators, program directors, and teachers currently in differentiated career positions. Each committee generally has about six members. The teacher committee includes teachers from the program area or those with a

strong interest in the program area as well as teachers representing building and/or grade-level interests. The administrator committee includes building administrators and directors of those program areas where the job opening occurs.

Each committee develops its own set of interview questions with guidance from the Personnel Department. The role of the Personnel Department is to ensure that no questions of a discriminatory nature are asked and that all negotiated contract provisions are understood and observed. Each interview takes about 45 minutes.

Each committee submits to the superintendent a list of the top candidates in rank order. Even though each committee operates independently, its recommendation of top candidates tends to be quite consistent, although not necessarily in the same rank order. The superintendent then interviews the top candidates and makes the appointment. Which of the top candidates the superintendent appoints involves consideration of several factors: future building and district administrative needs, male/female balance, career stage, enthusiasm, and probability of success, among others.

Although this selection process leaves the final decision to the superintendent, the participation of teachers on the interview committee provides for much peer input in selecting the top candidates. Teachers generally have felt comfortable with this level of participation.

## Determining the Length of the Appointment

Each differentiated career appointment is for a three-year term. While it is possible for teachers to repeat a second three-year term, they would have to go through the selection process again. Making the appointment for three years is somewhat arbitrary, but there is a rationale for it. First, it is generally agreed that being in a position for three years is long enough to carry out significant program change. Second, each of St. Cloud's major program areas, the Program Development Cycle and the Staff Performance Review and Development

Program, is designed around a three-year cycle. Thus, holding a leadership position for three years meshes nicely with the district's two main quality control programs.

A third reason for limiting differentiated career positions to a three-year cycle is that it provides an opportunity for more teachers to participate in decision-making and leadership roles. Without rotating these positions, a new level of bureaucracy could develop rather quickly. Rotating teachers in these positions brings new ideas and new enthusiasm to district programs. In addition, the three-year term can accommodate those teachers entering a new career stage.

Also, if teachers find that a leadership role is not for them, they can leave the position after three years without losing face. Working in a leadership role has its rewards, but it is demanding and different from classroom teaching. Three years of experience in a different role should be enough for teachers to assess the situation and determine whether they want to change their career plans.

There are some negative aspects to a three-year appointment policy. Some loss of program continuity is possible, and established interpersonal relationships may be lost when new personnel come on board. Also, some teachers indicate that it will be difficult for them to cycle back into their former classroom after having had the benefit of working conditions that include a private office, telephone, secretarial assistance, as well as some flexibility in their daily schedule. The authors share a vision that with continued restructuring and expansion of differentiated career opportunities, some of these benefits would be available for all classroom teachers.

Another issue raised by the differentiated career program is that as teachers gain leadership experience, their skills become highly marketable, and another district may seek to employ them. To some this may be considered a negative factor; but in the authors' view, helping talented teachers to become effective leaders is itself a worthy endeavor. If these teachers decide to take their skills to another district, the total profession will be better off.

## Compensating Differentiated Career Teachers

When teachers accept a differentiated career position, their compensation is increased using a prorated adjustment on the master salary schedule plus an extracurricular adjustment. Like many districts, the St. Cloud master salary schedule includes a separate extracurricular schedule for compensating teachers for duties performed beyond the normal work day. What is different in the St. Cloud extracurricular schedule is that in addition to the standard student activities component there is also a differentiated career component. Funds also are available for professional travel.

Differentiated career teachers are at the same level on the salary schedule as classroom teachers with similar education and experience. But with their longer work year, ranging from two to four weeks, their salary is prorated accordingly. The district allows a certain amount of discretion and flexibility as to when the extended work year occurs. Thus differentiated career teachers are able to plan their work year in terms of both personal and district needs.

## Protecting Seniority

The final element of St. Cloud's differentiated career program is the protection of seniority. By agreement with the St. Cloud Education Association, the master contract contains a statement of understanding that seniority in the appropriate job classification will be protected while a teacher is in a differentiated career position. This protection encourages individuals to risk taking on a new leadership role without giving up tenure or relocating to a new community.

After the three-year term in a differentiated career position, some will cycle into other leadership roles in the district, such as department head, building administrator, or director of a program area; others will move on to leadership positions in other districts. But in all cases our schools will be better because of the leadership opportunities provided in the differentiated career program.


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## Differentiated Career Personnel in Action

This chapter describes the work of differentiated career staff in seven program areas in District 742 in St. Cloud, Minnesota. These positions may or may not have parallels in other school districts. They are presented to show the variety and range of professional responsibilities that differentiated career staff can perform.

### Staff Performance Review and Development Program Coordinator

St. Cloud's SPRAD program assumes that good teachers can become better with appropriate support and resources. Every tenured teacher in District 742 participates in this program. The program follows a three-year cycle. The first two years of the cycle are devoted to development and review. A review of research and teaching practices helps to establish a common vocabulary for all involved in the program.

The first phase of the cycle involves peer review and coaching at the building level as well as the development of collegial support groups led by teacher facilitators. A district teacher/administrator team provides overall coordination. The third year of the cycle includes an evaluative component conducted by individual building administrators, who focus on the peer review and development activities of the previous two years. The building administrators also participate

in all the review and development activities of the program. The second three-year cycle is more highly individualized, focusing on the individual teacher and peer-group efforts. With this design, the building SPRAD resource person and the peer-group facilitators play an increasing role in staff development.

The SPRAD Program also includes a remedial phase to deal with the small number of serious instructional problems that might occur. In these cases the review, development, and evaluation phase are compressed as the building administrator, SPRAD Coordinator, and peer coaches all work together to find solutions.

The program uses several differentiated career positions. They are:

- SPRAD Coordinator
- Administrative Liaison
- SPRAD Trainer/Building Resource Person
- Unit Facilitator
- District SPRAD Council Representative

The first SPRAD Coordinator was a teacher who, following a very successful three-year period, is now functioning as an educational planner for a $25 million school building project. A second teacher now holds the position. Both were selected following the procedures outlined in the previous chapter.

The position of Administrative Liaison is similar to the differentiated career positions for teachers except that it is filled by a district administrator. The person in this position facilitates the administrative components of the SPRAD Program. A principal or assistant principal assumes this role in addition to his or her building responsibility. This person is involved in the evaluative component of the SPRAD Program. But because of the peer relationships established, there is a greater focus on mutual support and growth experiences rather than on the formal evaluation typically conducted by a district-level administrator.

A third differentiated career position is a Building Resource Person at each school. This position has evolved from that of SPRAD Dis-

trict Trainer. The major function of this position is to assist with observations, consultations, and coaching of teachers at the building level.

A fourth differentiated career position is the Unit Facilitator, a building staff member whose function is to aid administrators and staff by leading/supervising a peer group and assisting individual teachers with goal achievement plans. As a member of the building team, the Unit Facilitator helps in the assessment of building inservice needs and the planning and implementation of building inservice programs.

The entire process is supported by a district SPRAD Council composed of seven administrators and seven teachers elected from the teaching staff.

## Program Development Cycle Coordinator

The second program area using differentiated career positions is the Program Development Cycle (PDC), an on-going system of curriculum development and assessment. Since District 742 does not have a district-level administrator with a specific responsibility for curriculum, this responsibility is assumed by the PDC Coordinator, a teacher in a differentiated career position.

The PDC Coordinator, with the assistance of another person in a differentiated position, facilitates a five-step process of curriculum development and assessment. Every curricular area falls within the Program Development Cycle. The cycle was initiated in 1984, and by 1989 all curricular areas in the district were somewhere in the five-step process. In addition, each curricular area has a chair and a representative teacher committee. These, too, are differentiated career opportunities but with less responsibility than the PDC Coordinator. Teachers in these positions receive extra compensation, released time, and inservice training.

## Planning, Evaluation, and Reporting Coordinator

The program area of Planning, Evaluation, and Reporting (PER) is facilitated by the PER Coordinator, also a teacher in a differenti-

ated career position. This person's role is closely related to the curriculum review and assessment function of the Program Development Cycle. In Minnesota there is a statutory requirement of community and parental involvement in curriculum. The PER Coordinator links the parental/community expectations for their schools with delivery of programs to meet those expectations. The person in this position facilitates the interaction of the teaching staff and parental/community members in a systematic program of curriculum assessment and improvement.

## Academic Achievement Coordinator

This program area uses three levels of differentiated career positions in the district's efforts to serve high achieving and high potential students. These positions include a district Academic Achievement Coordinator, a Learning Resources Facilitator, and building-level Academic Achievement Coordinators.

The district Academic Achievement Coordinator works closely with both SPRAD and PDC when dealing with curriculum and instruction for high achieving/high potential students. One example of the work of this person is arranging for expanded curricular offerings with nearby colleges and universities.

The Learning Resources Facilitator has the responsibility of coordinating the resources at both the district and building instructional media centers for teachers to use with high achieving/high potential students. The person in this position also coordinates the academic competitions for students at both building and district levels and plans and participates in the staff development programs for teachers working with gifted and talented students.

The building-level Academic Achievement Coordinator is different in some schools, where the position is held by a highly trained and interested parent. Strong teacher support groups have developed under the leadership of the principal and the building Academic Achievement Coordinator.

Through the support provided by district and building-level differentiated career positions, the program for high achieving/high potential students in District 742 has become stronger. Teachers are helping teachers to meet the needs of high ability students. Good teachers are becoming better and the needs of more students are being met.

## Chapter I Coordinator

District 742 has a variety of programs to serve students who are not succeeding in school. These include early identification programs for students with learning problems, working with parents of preschool children, cooperating with the Boys Club and Girls Club in their Kidstop program, which provides after-school and summer programs for latchkey children, and many others. At the present time a teacher in a differentiated career position coordinates the Chapter I program. The potential exists for many more differentiated career positions in this program area.

## Assessment Coordinator

A critical element for any school improvement effort is the access to comprehensive and relevant data. The data needs in District 742 are the responsibility of the Assessment Coordinator, another differentiated career position. The function of this position is not evaluative. Rather, this person assists in the identification of needed data, develops or identifies appropriate test instruments, and provides analysis of test scores and other evaluative instruments.

By collecting and analyzing data related to all major program areas in District 742, this person is able to provide a high level of accountability for school improvement efforts in the district. And because this position is held by a teacher, there is greater rapport with faculty and more credibility attached to assessment activities.

## Special Education Coordinator

District 742 uses a variation of the differentiated career plan for its special education programs because of the special qualifications

needed to work in this area. Special Education Coordinator positions are not limited to the three-year cycle, and the selection process for filling these positions does not use the peer-interview procedures of the regular differentiated career positions. However, persons in these positions work with teachers in a consultative role similar to other differentiated career staff.



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## Conclusion

Differentiated career opportunities for teachers are a way of tapping the leadership potential existing in any school or district. They offer a way of recognizing and rewarding teachers as they move through career stages. However, differentiated career opportunities will require modifications in traditional school organization structures and redefinitions of job roles.

The differentiated career plan in District 742 was phased in over a five-year period and is still evolving. The conditions in the district that made this plan feasible are not unique to St. Cloud, Minnesota. They exist in many school districts. Districts considering such a plan may want to start with a pilot project in one program area or in one school building. The experience gained in a pilot project will then serve as a model for expanding the program.

Central to the differentiated careers concept is the collegial spirit that comes from teachers helping other teachers. They come to see how instruction, curriculum, and evaluation are interrelated. For teachers who are enthusiastic and want to lead, the differentiated career plan offers the opportunity.

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